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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIALISM.—III.

BY W. H. MALLOCK.

I HAVE shown abundantly in the two preceding articles that socialism, as a distinctive theory, issuing in a distinctive programme, or even as a theory embodying any definite ideas of any kind, is essentially a theory which appeals to the many, as distinct from the few; and, farther, that it owes whatever success has been achieved by it to its success in the popularization of one fundamental doctrine—that the many contain in themselves all the active forces of society; whilst the few, the employers, the present possessors of capital, are merely an encumbrance, or a sort of parasitic growth, and may, since they thus perform no productive functions, be completely dispossessed by the many, if the many will only realize that they are supreme, not alone as a social force, but as a legislative force also.

I have illustrated this fact by reference to actual history; and have shown how this theory, with regard to the power of the many, was first made the nucleus of a definite and coherent party by the genius of Karl Marx, who invested it with a quasi-scientific form, and managed to impose the doctrine that all wealth is due to labor on multitudes of the laboring classes as a strict economic truth.

Now, this feat of reasoning has two practical merits. It reduces the vague idea of the potential supremacy of the many to a proposition so simple and definite that the meanest intelligence can comprehend it. It also reduces it to a proposition so simple and definite that its truth or falsehood can be submitted to the most rigorous tests; and I have shown that labor, or the manual effort of the individual, as directed solely by the mind of the individual himself, is the sole productive agency in primitive societies only, whose wealth consists of no more than the bare

necessaries of existence; and that industrial effort becomes more productive, as a whole, only in proportion as another species of effort develops itself—that is to say, the mental ability of the few, by which the manual efforts of the many are directed, organized and coordinated. I also showed how this process of minute and all-embracing direction is accomplished by means of capital, in what is functionally its fundamental form—that is to say, by wage-capital and the modern system of wages, capital being thus the vehicle of directive ability, and not, as Marx conceived of it, a mere functionless and accidental monopoly. I showed, moreover, that so far are the profits of capital from being, as Marx contended, abstractions from the products of individual labor, that the wages of modern labor are largely abstractions from the products of directive ability functioning by means of capital.

I showed all this, and I showed something else besides. I showed, by quotations from their writings, that the more thoughtful socialists of to-day are beginning to admit the truth of every one of the above contentions. In the first place, whenever they address themselves to any cultivated and critical audience—as has been illustrated by a variety of replies which, in various parts of America, they have made, with curious unanimity, to my own late lectures on socialism, they vie with each other in repudiating the crude reasoning of Marx, declaring that they are quite aware, without instruction from anybody else, that labor alone is powerless to produce that wealth by the amplitude of which the modern world is distinguished, and that the direction of labor by the keenest and most energetic minds is no less essential to the result than is mere labor itself. They now admit that the few, as represented by capital, are, instead of being the mere appropriators of wealth, the producers of a very large portion of it. Further, they are beginning to recognize that the essence of the capitalistic wage system is not the underpayment of labor, but the direction of labor by ability; and some of the leading spirits amongst them, such, for instance, as Mr. Sidney Webb, exhibit their recognition of this last fact most clearly by their efforts to make good the earlier promises of their party, and devise a means by which the wage system may be abolished, and give place to a substitute. The substitute which they offer is, as I pointed out, neither more nor less than a system of state coercion, under which

every citizen would be remunerated irrespectively of the labor performed by him; and the requisite conformity to the industrial orders issued to him would be secured, as in the case of slaves, by the application of external force—a system which, as the history of slavery shows us, is, if not so efficient as the wage system, at all events not unworkable, and theoretically might take the place of it, if the laborers really like it better. Indeed, so far as our enquiry has yet proceeded, the system sketched out by the intellectual socialists of to-day differs, with the exception of the proposed reintroduction of slavery, from the existing capitalistic system in one particular only. It retains the employing class—the men whom Mr. Webb aptly describes as “the natural monopolists of special business ability,” and requires of them that they shall exercise all their highest powers in the direction of labor, precisely as they do now; but, whilst thus making them still the technical masters of labor, it would reduce them, in their turn, to the position of servants of the state, so that the products of their ability would be taken by the state, not by themselves, and would thus be available for distribution amongst the general mass of the community.

Now, such an organization of society might, for anything that we have yet seen to the contrary, be no less workable than society as it exists to-day. But we shall find, having admitted this, that a further question arises, which it still remains for us to consider. That the state should supply every laborer with board, lodging and pocket-money, without any regard to the specific labor performed by him, and then secure the requisite labor and obedience by force, by punishment, or by the fear of them, is a plan which experience shows to be, within limits, effective. The pyramids were constructed by precisely such a method as this. But to secure and to control the requisite manual labor is, on the admission of the more thoughtful socialists themselves, only half of the task which would lie before the socialistic state. The other half of the task, which they are now beginning to recognize as one even more important, is to secure the services of those exceptional men by whom all this labor is to be directed in the most efficient way—the men of science, the chemists, the mathematicians, the men of constructive imagination, the men of executive talent, on whose constant activity the productiveness of ordinary labor will depend. By what means will the socialistic state be able to com-

mand the services of men like these, and insure the exercise of their powers at a constant maximum of intensity?

Here we have to deal with a problem which, for one reason, at all events, if for no other, is entirely different from that of the control of ordinary labor. To secure from men the exertion of their ordinary manual faculties by positive coercion, instead of by the inducement of wages, is, let me repeat, possible; but it is possible for one reason only. In respect of the faculties embodied in ordinary labor, any one man by looking at another can tell how far he is possessed of them—whether he can trundle a wheelbarrow, carry a hod of bricks, hit a nail on the head, and so forth; and—what is still more important—every director of labor knows exactly the individual task which he wishes each laborer to perform. But in respect of the faculties—not ordinary, but exceptional—which are distinctive of the men by whom alone labor can be successfully directed, both these conditions are wanting. It is impossible to tell that any man of exceptional ability possesses any exceptional faculties for directing labor at all, unless he himself chooses to show them; and, indeed, until circumstances supply him with some motive for showing them, he will probably be hardly aware that he possesses such faculties himself. Moreover, even if he gives the world some reason to suspect their existence, the world at large will not know what he can do with them, and will consequently be unable to impose on him any definite task. Any Scotch farmer, by looking at Burns, could have told that he had in him the makings of a sufficiently good ploughman, and could have forced him, under certain circumstances, to do so much ploughing daily. Any one could have told that Shakespeare was capable of holding horses at the theatre door, and could have compelled him to hold them as the condition of getting his daily bread; but no one could have compelled Burns or Shakespeare to write “Auld Lang Syne” or “Hamlet.” A press-gang could have forced Columbus to labor as a common seaman, but not the whole population of Europe could have forced him to discover a new world; for the mass of his contemporaries, until his enterprise proved successful, obstinately refused to believe that there was any new world to discover.

The men, therefore, by whose ability alone labor is successfully directed, and on the exercise of whose ability the wealth of the modern world depends, would stand, with regard to the socialistic

state, in a position fundamentally different from that of the ordinary laborer. The exercise of their distinctive power, unlike those of the laborer, could never be secured by coercion, because neither the state nor the nation could know that these powers existed except in so far as the possessors of them chose to reveal the secret. They could not be made to reveal it. They could only be induced to do so; and they could only be induced to do so by a society which was so constituted as to offer for an exceptional performance some exceptional reward, just as a reward is offered for evidence against some unknown murderer. The reward which is offered to them by society as at present constituted is the possession of exceptional wealth, proportionate to the amount produced by them; but it is precisely this species of reward that the intellectual socialists of to-day aim at abolishing no less completely than did their predecessors of the school of Marx, though they have learned to explain its origin and present existence on totally different principles, and to recognize its abolition as a totally different problem.

Now, not only have the more intellectual socialists come, as we have seen already, to realize that the productiveness of industry in the modern world depends, both for its progress and its sustentation, on the ability of the directing class, and that its direction must be accomplished either by the wage system, or by state coercion, but they have also come to realize that the question we have been just considering—namely, the question of how, if the pecuniary motive is withdrawn, the ability of the exceptional few can be induced either to reveal or exert itself—is the question on which the entire practicability of the socialistic scheme depends. Nor can it be said that, having realized this fact, the more recent socialistic thinkers have shown any inclination to shirk it. They have, on the contrary, during the past fifteen years, been devoting themselves with increasing frequency to the elaboration of a satisfactory answer to it. Mr. Webb and his English allies have in this way been especially active; and their attempts to discover a motive which shall stimulate the able man, other than that now in operation, and yet equally certain and effective, throws more light than anything since the original folly of Marx on the kind of intellectual soil in which socialism, as a theory, germinates.

It may be looked on as evidence of the methodical and quasi-

scientific accuracy with which modern socialists have set themselves to discuss the required motive, that the thought of all of them has moved along exactly the same lines, and that what all of them fix upon as a substitute for the desire of pecuniary gain is one or other, or all, of a few motives actually in operation, and notoriously effective in certain spheres of activity; the socialistic argument being that nothing can be more easy than to extend their operation to the sphere of ordinary production also. These motives practically resolve themselves into four, which have been classified as follows by Mr. Webb, or one of his coadjutors: "The mere pleasure of excelling"; "the joy in creative work"; the satisfaction which working for others brings to "the instincts of benevolence"; and, lastly, the desire for approval, or the homage which is called "honor." Any one of these, according to our socialistic philosophers, would stimulate industrial ability in quite as efficient a way, if the prospect of all pecuniary gain were withdrawn, as that in which the desire of such gain stimulates it under the existing system.

Now, that the motives here in question are motives of extraordinary power, all history shows us. The most impressive things accomplished by human nature have been due to them. But let us consider what these things are. They are not only impressive, but thus far they have been strictly limited in number. We shall find that they are referable to one or other of the following kinds of activity—those of the artist, of the speculative thinker, of the religious and philanthropic enthusiast, and, lastly, that of the soldier. This list, if understood in its full sense, is exhaustive. Such being the case, then, the argument of the socialists is as follows: that, because a Fra Angelico will paint a Christ or a Virgin; because a Kant will immolate all his years to philosophy; because a monk and a sister of mercy will devote themselves to the victims of a pestilence; because a soldier in action will eagerly face death—all without any thought of exceptional pecuniary reward, the directors of industrial labor, if only such rewards are made impossible for them, will at once become amenable to the motives of the soldier, the artist, the philosopher, the inspired philanthropist and the saint. This is the assertion of the socialists, when reduced to a precise form, and what we have to do is to consider whether this assertion is true. Does human nature, as experience, as psychology, and as physiology reveal it to us, give

grounds, in fact, for taking such an assertion seriously? Any one who has studied human conduct historically, who has observed it in the life around him, and noted the diversities of temperament which go with diversities of capacity, will dismiss such an idea, on reflection, as at once groundless and ridiculous.

Let us—to go into details—take the case of the artist. What reason is there to suppose that the impassioned emotion which stimulates an adoring monk to lavish all his genius on an altar-piece will stimulate another man to devise and to organize the production of some new kind of liquid enamel for the decoration of cheap furniture? Yet again, let us consider the desire for speculative truth, as actually exhibited in the lives of the great philosophic thinkers. These men—men of the type of Kant and Hegel—have been proverbially, and often ludicrously, indifferent to all material details. Who can suppose that the disinterested passion for truth which had the effect of making such men forget their dinners, will stimulate others to devote themselves to the improvement of stoves and saucepans? Yet again, let us consider the area of the industrial influence of the motives originating in religious fervor and benevolence. The most important illustration of this is to be found in the monastic orders. The motives in question, for example, prompted St. Francis and his followers to a life of effort whose object not only was not the acquirement of exceptional wealth, but was the abnegation of it. But, even in the days when Christian piety was at its highest, those who were capable of practical response to motives of this lofty kind formed but a fraction of the general population of Christendom; and even amongst them these motives constantly failed to operate, and desire for personal gain insisted on reasserting itself. One might as well argue that, because the monastic orders renounced matrimony, the rest of mankind may be induced to renounce it also, as argue that, because some exceptional men have been united by religious enthusiasm to do certain kinds of arduous and exceptional work, other men, with totally different temperaments, are likely to be stimulated by the same or similar motives to do other exceptional work of an entirely different character—that is to say, to produce exceptional wealth, and not to expect a reward of the same order as their products.

But the quality of the reasoning of the socialists, in this connection, is best illustrated by their treatment of the fact on which

they themselves lay the greatest stress. This is the conduct of the soldier, who is, as they say, not only willing, but eager, to perform duties of the most painful and dangerous kind, without any thought of receiving for it any higher pay than his fellows; from which fact, they argue, as we have seen already, that conduct of a similar kind may be naturalized in the world of industry. And a similar moral has been drawn from the soldier's case, not by socialists only, but by other thinkers also—thinkers of very high distinction. Thus Ruskin says that his whole scheme of political economy is based on the moral assimilation of industrial action to military. "Soldiers of the ploughshare," he exclaims, "as well as soldiers of the sword! All my political economy is comprehended in that phrase." So, too, Mr. Frederic Harrison, the English prophet of positivism, has declared that the readiness with which the soldier will die in battle is a type of a readiness latent in men generally to spend themselves and be spent in the peaceful service of humanity. Again, in the same sense, another writer observes: "The soldier's subsistence is certain. It does not depend on his exertions. At once he becomes susceptible to appeals to his patriotism, and he will value a bit of bronze, which is the reward of valor, far more than a hundred times its weight in gold"—a passage to which one of Mr. Webb's collaborators refers with special delight, exclaiming triumphantly, "Let those notice this last fact who fancy we must wait till men are angels before socialism is practical."

Now, to all these arguments drawn from the facts of military activity there is one answer to be made. They are all of them founded on a failure to perceive that military activity is, in many respects, a thing apart, and depends on psychological and physiological conditions which have no analogies in the domain of ordinary economic effort. That such is the case can be very easily seen by following out the train of reasoning suggested by Mr. Frederic Harrison. Mr. Harrison sees that, in ordinary life, a man will not deliberately run the risk of being killed or mutilated, except for the sake of some object the achievement of which is profoundly desired by him; and Mr. Harrison and the other writers just quoted assume that such must be the case on the field of battle also—in other words, that the willingness of the soldier to be wounded, or killed, if need be, results from and is a measure of his devotion to the country on whose behalf he fights. And, in

certain cases, this inference is, no doubt, justified; but that it does not explain the nature of the soldier's behavior generally, and that there must be behind this some deeper and more general cause, is shown by the fact that some of the bravest and most reckless soldiers known to history have been mercenaries who would fight as readily for one country as for another. And this deeper and more general cause, when we look for it, is sufficiently obvious. It consists of the fact that, owing to the millenniums of struggle which have made men what they are to-day, the instinct of fighting is inherent in the dominant races, and will always prompt numbers to do, for the smallest reward or for none, what they could hardly, in its absence, be induced to do for the greatest. This instinct, no doubt, is more controlled than formerly, and is not so frequently roused; but it is still there. It is ready to quicken at the mere sound of military music, and the sight of regiments marching stirs the most apathetic crowd. High-spirited boys, again, for the mere pleasure of fighting, will run the risk of having their noses broken, whilst they will wince at getting up in the cold for the sake of learning their lessons, and would certainly rebel against being set to work as wage-earners at a task which involved so much as a daily pricking of their fingers.

Here we have the reason, embodied in the very organism of the human being, why military activity is something essentially distinct from industrial, and why any inference drawn from the one to the other is valueless. This fact, which is of primary scientific importance, the philosophy of the socialists altogether overlooks; and I have called special attention to the conduct of men as fighters, partly because the socialists themselves attach such extreme importance to it, and partly because their treatment of it affords us an exceptionally striking illustration of the utterly unscientific manner in which they are accustomed to reason about matters with regard to which they profess themselves to be the pioneers of accurate science. One of the principal grounds on which they attack what they call the economics of capitalism is that it deals exclusively with the actions of the economic man, or the man whose one motive is the personal appropriation of wealth. Such a man is, they say, an abstraction. He does not exist in reality. The actual man is a complex being, whose selfish and acquisitive motives are traversed by many others; and if economics, they

continue, is to have any scientific value, it must deal with man as a whole, in all his living complexity. This contention has an element of truth in it, as a criticism of the orthodox economists; but when the socialists attempt to act in accordance with their own professed principles and deal with human nature as a whole, instead of only one of its elements, they do nothing but travesty the class of error which they set out with denouncing. The one-motived man who cares only for personal gain is, no doubt, an abstraction, which has no actual counterpart. Still, the motive ascribed to him is one which has a real existence; it has been defined with accuracy, and by studying its effects in isolation we reach many true conclusions. But the other motives with which the socialists declare that we must supplement this are treated by them in a manner so indefinite, so crude, so childish, so utterly deficient in the mere rudiments of scientific analysis, that they do not correspond to anything. Instead of forming any true addition to the data of economic science, they are like images belonging to the dream of a maudlin schoolgirl, which have only the effect of obscuring, not of completing, the facts of human nature to which the orthodox economists confined themselves, and which, though incomplete, are, so far as they go, actual. Now, however, let us, without getting out of touch with the socialists, return to firmer ground; and, having seen the futility of their efforts to indicate any motive which shall stimulate the higher productive efficiencies, other than that supplied under the existing system by the prospect of possessing wealth in proportion to the amount produced, let us consider this motive itself, as history and experience reveal it to us.

And here, in the presence of facts which no one seeks to deny, we shall find that the socialists themselves are amongst our most pertinent witnesses, affording in what they assert a solitary and signal exception to that looseness of thought and observation which is otherwise, as I said, characteristic of them. The motive now in question on the part of the exceptional wealth-producer, the director of labor, the man of business ability, which the socialists propose to supersede, but which is at present in possession of the field, commonly receives from these theorists the vituperative name of "greed." What they mean by "greed" is simply the desire of the producer to retain a share of wealth for himself, proportionate to the amount produced by him. And what have the

socialists got to tell us about greed, when they turn from their plans for superseding it in the socialistic future to consider its operations in the actual past and present? They tell us a great deal. For what is and always has been their stock moral indictment against the typical men of ability, the capitalistic directors of labor, the introducers of new inventions, the amplifiers of the world's wealth? Their chief indictment against such men has been this—that, instead of working solely for the pleasure of benefiting their fellows, their motive has been greed, and personal greed alone. Its influence, they say, is as old as civilization itself, and was as operative in Tyre and Sidon as it is in London and Pittsburg. In other words, they declare that, so far as history and observation teach us anything, the desire of personal gain is just as inseparable from the temperament which goes with the power of producing exceptional wealth as “joy in creation” is from the highest art of the painter, or the love of some woman is from the lover's efforts to win her.

We thus see that those thinkers who, when they are dealing with an imaginary future, are being driven to stake all their hopes on the possibility of a complete elimination of a certain motive from a certain special class of persons, are the very men who are most vehement in declaring that in this special class of persons the motive in question is so inseparable a part of their character that it has never as yet, in any age or country, showed signs of appreciable modification. Nor does the matter end here; for the curious contradiction in which socialistic thought thus lands itself—between its assertion, on the one hand, that greed is inveterate in the temperament of the great wealth-producer, and its contention, on the other hand, that this inveterate motive can with the greatest ease be eliminated and replaced by others—is emphasized by the fact that, when turning from the few to the many—from the few who produce much to the many who produce little—they assume, in the case of the many, as an instinct of eternal justice, the very desire for personal gain which, in the case of the few, they first describe as a hideous and incurable moral disease, and then propose to cure, as though it were the passing ailment of a baby. For what is the bait with which, from its first beginnings till to-day, socialism has sought to secure the support of the general multitude? It is mainly, if not solely, the promise of increased personal gain, without any increased exer-

tion on the part of the happy recipients. With Marx and the earlier socialists, this promise took the form of declaring that every man has a sacred right to the whole of the wealth produced by him, that all the wealth of the world is produced by the manual laborers, and that the laborers must never be satisfied until they have secured all of it. The intellectual socialists of to-day, having gradually come to perceive that labor itself produces but a fraction of this wealth only, have had to alter the form of this promise; but they still adhere to its substance, and the altered form which they give to it does but bring out more sharply the fact that they appeal to the desire of personal gain as the primary economic motive of the great majority of mankind. For, whereas the earlier socialists contented themselves with promising the laborer the whole of what he produced, and promising it on the ground that he had produced it, what the laborer is promised by the intellectual socialists of to-day is not only all that he has produced—which in most cases he gets already—but a great deal more besides which is admittedly produced by others.

We thus see that, according to the socialistic speculation of to-day, the kind of moral conversion which is to make socialism practicable is to be rigidly confined to one particular class; for, on the part of the majority, no change is required at all in order to render the socialistic evangel welcome. So far as they are concerned, the old Adam is quite sufficient. None of us need much moral converting in order to welcome the prospect of an indefinite addition to our incomes, which will cost us nothing but the trouble of stretching out our hands to take it. Socialists often complain that, under the existing dispensation, there is one law for the many and another law for the few. They propose themselves to introduce a difference which goes still deeper, and provide the few and the many, not only with two laws, but with different natures, and two antithetic moralities. The morality of the many is to remain, as it always has been, comfortably based on the familiar desire for dollars; the morality of the few is to be based on some hitherto unknown contempt for them; and the class which the socialists fix upon as the subjects of this moral transformation is precisely the class which they denounce as being, and as having always been, in respect of its devotion to dollars, the most obstinately and hopelessly incorrigible.

That arguments such as these, ending in an absurdity like

this, and starting with the assumption that it is possible to animate a manufacturer's office with the spirit of soldiers facing an enemy's guns, should actually emanate from sane men, would be unbelievable if the arguments were not being repeated from day to day, and repeated by men who, in many respects, are ingenious reasoners. Of the depths of absurdity to which such men can descend, when engaged in the discussion of this question of the transformation, I will give one example more, which is supplied to us by Mr. Sidney Webb. In order to show how readily the great directors of labor may be induced in the future to forego all personal claims on the wealth which will be due to the continued exercise of their talents, Mr. Webb declares that it will be very easy to convince them that the special ability with which persons like themselves are born "is an unearned increment, due to the effect of the struggle for existence on their ancestors; and that, consequently, having been produced by society, it is as much due to society as the unearned increment of rent." Now, of course, in a certain sense this contention is true, and for the purely speculative sociologist it possesses its own significance; but that it has no bearing on the problems to which Mr. Webb seeks to apply it, and that it will have no practical influence on the conduct of any man, woman or child, may be seen at once by following Mr. Webb's example, and carrying his own logic a little farther than he has done himself. If the able man, who produces more wealth than his fellows, has no claim to the possession of exceptional wealth himself, because he owes his exceptional productivity not to himself, but to society, it is to society as a whole that the idle man owes his idleness, the stupid man owes his stupidity, and the dishonest man his dishonesty; and if the man who produces much is able to claim with justice no more wealth than the man who produces little, the man who is so idle or drunken that he will not produce anything may with equal justice claim as much wealth as either. Can the force of nonsense go farther than this?

Such is the reasoning to which the more thoughtful socialists of to-day, having escaped from the crudity of the original doctrine of socialism that the wealth of the modern world is due wholly to manual labor, are now driven to resort, so as still to promise the masses a general redistribution of wealth, whilst abandoning the theory of production on which that promise

originally based itself. We find their reasoning, in proportion to its own logical consistency, moving in a vicious circle, tethered to an impossible conclusion like a cow tethered to a stake, and escaping from absurdity of one kind only to land itself in another—escaping from a theory of production which is worthy only of a child, by adopting a theory of human nature which is even more elaborately childish.

The explanation of this phenomenon is, as we shall see hereafter, to be found, not in the fact that these theorists—such, for instance, as Mr. Sidney Webb—are deficient in their mere powers of reasoning, but in the fact that they are deficient in their knowledge of those complex social forces to which their reasoning is applied. And that such is the case is indicated by the remarkable fact that the men who are foremost in demanding that wealth shall be redistributed are notoriously men who have been impotent to do anything towards increasing, or even maintaining, the already increased production of it themselves. But, in addition to their personal inacquaintance with the productive and constructive forces at work in the modern world, the more thoughtful socialists of to-day owe their naïve ideas with regard to the plasticity of human motive to a theory of society which is not peculiar to socialism. This is the theory that, in any community or nation in which each citizen is equally free to express his will by his vote and realizes the extent of the power which thus resides in him, the will of the majority has practically no limits to its efficiency, and will be able in the future to bring about moral changes which seem at present to be beyond the limits of possibility only because the means for effecting them have never yet been fully utilized.

This conception of voting majorities, as possessing an absolute power of moulding societies in accordance with their recorded will, forms, as it were, a reservoir of vague and unanalyzed thought, from which many kinds of opinion other than socialistic are irrigated. Socialism, however, in all its forms alike, appeals to this conception of democracy with an insistence peculiar to itself; and with this conception of democracy I shall deal in the following article.

W. H. MALLOCK.

(To be Continued.)